UNITED NATIONS **S**

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1999/36
13 January 1999

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 13 JANUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a press release issued on 13 January 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Press release dated 13 January 1999, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia

In a Press Statement made public on 12 January 1999, the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs has informed the international community about the alleged plan by Ethiopia to "launch an attack against Eritrea".

The ostensible objective of the statement is obviously to underline how Eritrea is committed to avoiding recourse to war and to the cessation of hostilities and, in general, to peace. It does not matter for the Eritrean authorities that it is they who created the current crisis by invading Ethiopia; that they still are illegally occupying Ethiopian territory; and that there is a peace proposal by the OAU which Ethiopia has accepted and Eritrea has not. Nor is the timing of the latest Statement by Eritrea totally fortuitous.

The Eritrean authorities know that they are being pinned down on whether they are willing to withdraw from the Ethiopian territory that they have forcibly occupied. They have since the Ouagadougou OAU Summit of the Central Organ been resorting to all kinds of gimmicks to avoid responding to the peace proposal in good faith.

Obviously, Eritrea realizes that it has come to the end of the road as far as OAU's peace effort is concerned. The OAU has affirmed Eritrea is the aggressor. The OAU has said Eritrea should withdraw from Ethiopian territory. The OAU has insisted that the Ethiopian administration should return. Under these circumstances and in line with the modus operandi which has now become familiar, Eritrea has seen fit to encourage a shift in emphasis from the demand for its withdrawal from Ethiopian territory to talks about what Eritrea hopes would be a permanent cessation of hostilities which would consecrate its occupation of Ethiopian territory. To reiterate, these Eritrean tactics are not new. It is to be recalled that between 9 and 11 June 1998, when Eritrea launched offensives to expand its aggression at the Zalambessa, Irdemattiwos and Bure fronts, it simultaneously issued statements accusing Ethiopia of aggression.

A stranger pattern of behaviour was evidenced more recently as well. Just prior to the Ouagadougou meeting between members of the High-Level Delegation and the parties in conflict, Eritrea embarked on a wave of shellings in the border areas, around Shiraro and Adigrat.

Later as the OAU Central Organ Meeting approached - specifically on 15 December - Eritrea attacked the Mai Hamato-Belessa area in Central Tigrai and, a few days later, positions in Adi Goshu. Both the November and December incidents of provocation were interspersed with taunts pushing Ethiopia to act in a reactive fashion.

Today, when all attention is focused on when the implementation of the OAU peace proposal, which is still held hostage by Eritrean intransigence, would commence, the Eritrean authorities create yet another diversion, drawing

attention to a fictitious impending offensive by Ethiopia and turning the issue of compliance with OAU's proposals to withdraw from occupied territories to the issues of ceasefire and "moratorium" on air strikes.

Could this also be a smokescreen behind which Eritrea would launch a wider aggression? This may very well be. Is it the familiar story of a leadership resisting being pinned down to implement the OAU proposals and issuing in lieu of that, diversionary statements? That may also very well be. Whatever the objectives may be they have no chance of succeeding.

Eritrea would be better off choosing the path of peace, in which case what would be expected of it is to cooperate with the OAU and accept its peace proposal.